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ABSTRACT

Community-based organizations (CBOs) can help students gain a broad understanding of the relationship between education, work, and community. CBOs are frequently able to expand the scope of school-to-work by providing opportunities for young people to address community issues and by incorporating a unique youth perspective into the development of school-to-work opportunities. Potential roles for community-based organizations include the following: (1) helping create, implement, and manage the school-to-work system; (2) securing community involvement; (3) providing work-based learning; (4) serving at-risk and out-of-school youth; and (5) providing access to support services. Strategies for engaging CBOs are as follows: challenging assumptions, bringing all stakeholders to the table, taking a participatory approach to agreeing on goals and roles, building on existing partnerships, and taking time to build trust. Examples of effective practices include the Academy of Manufacturing and Engineering Technology in Minneapolis (Minnesota) and the Diploma Plus Program in several Massachusetts communities. (Resources listed include 12 organizations and 12 publications.) (KC)

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Involving Community-Based Organizations in School-to-Work

The School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 helps guide states and communities in their efforts to make systemic changes in the way students are prepared for life beyond the classroom walls. To help students make this transition, school-to-work initiatives organize learning experiences within the context of work and community settings. Making these profound changes in the structures and processes of student learning requires a collaborative effort involving a broad range of partners that represent the different elements of a community. These partners may include elementary, secondary, and postsecondary educational institutions; private and public employers; community-based organizations; labor organizations; parents; students; state and local education agencies; and training and human service agencies. The purpose of school-to-work partnerships is to encourage these entities to work together to ensure that every student is educated and prepared for the "real world."

Community-based organizations (CBOs) can help students gain a broad understanding of the relationship between education, work, and community. Community-based organizations are defined as non-governmental entities providing services within a community. CBOs are often overlooked as partners in school-to-work systems, yet they are frequently able to expand the scope of school-to-work by providing opportunities for young people to address community issues and by incorporating a unique youth perspective into the development of school-to-work opportunities. CBOs can sometimes provide educational opportunities that formal schools cannot. Some CBOs also enhance school-to-work partnerships by assuming a variety of important functions and services that other partners may be unable or unwilling to fulfill.

This resource bulletin focuses on engaging CBOs in school-to-work systems. The bulletin discusses possible roles that CBOs can play, strategies for engaging CBOs, examples of effective practices, and resource organizations that can provide further information on how to involve CBOs.

Potential Roles for Community-Based Organizations

CBOs may be involved in school-to-work in a variety of ways. Some assume multiple roles, while others serve only one specific function. A few of the many possibilities are highlighted below.

Helping Create, Implement, and Manage the System. CBOs often have experience in designing and implementing youth-serving programs; these experiences may prove invaluable in building a comprehensive school-to-work system. A CBO's broad base of knowledge about a community's strengths, needs, and leaders is an important ingredient in planning school-to-work partnerships. As entities that are already working within the community, CBOs can also play an important role in implementation. Many CBOs operate youth-serving programs that address the needs of special populations and possess the skills to operate community-wide initiatives. Some CBOs may have the capacity to coordinate activities, engage other stakeholders, and help manage the partnership. When school-to-work systems include complex relationships among the various partners, CBOs may serve as organizations that can facilitate partnerships without a specific school or business perspective.

Securing Community Involvement. CBOs have often laid the groundwork of developing connections to the community at large. In some areas, CBOs are already pivots of community life, where community members are accustomed to accessing a wide variety of services such as daycare, counseling, job placement, etc. By expanding upon this already developed trust, CBOs may be more effective than

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schools at building awareness, engaging all stakeholders, and securing greater community participation in school-to-work initiatives. CBOs can also serve as a mechanism for publicizing school-to-work activities through already established mediums of communication and points of contact. Some CBOs have had enough community presence to involve otherwise inaccessible stakeholders, put pressure on local politicians, and secure funding.

Providing Work-based Learning. While some school-to-work initiatives struggle to find employers who are willing to provide work-based learning experiences, CBOs may be employers themselves or may have existing relationships with employers, which can lead to broader representation of employers in the school-to-work system. CBOs' ties are often particularly strong with community-based employers. Their proven track record with employers can provide the assurance that involvement in school-to-work is a worthwhile investment of employers' time and resources. Some CBOs may have the knowledge and experience to engage in workforce analysis by assessing job availability, skills needed, and existing resources. CBOs can also function as work-based or service learning sites for students. In addition, students gain a valuable community perspective by becoming involved in the provision of various community services like daycare, tutoring, community repair, etc., as well as in the organizational functioning of CBOs.

Serving At-risk and Out-of-school Youth. In order for school-to-work initiatives to serve all youth, they must find a way to address the needs of at-risk and out-of-school youth. Many times, CBOs target these audiences and offer innovative programs that creatively engage youth who have not been well-served by the formal system. Some CBOs provide degree-granting programs, such as GED preparation and alternative diploma programs, while others supply recruitment, referral, placement, and support services to connect youth with opportunities for school-based and work-based learning. School-to-work partnerships that serve out-of-school youth can be administered by CBOs autonomously or in collaboration with schools. However, the expertise that certain CBOs have developed through serving out-of-school youth can also be applied to enrich the educational experience of in-school students, resulting in enhanced learning for all students.

Providing Access to Support Services. CBOs can offer extensive networks to provide the support that may be absent from the personal or academic lives of many young people. CBOs often provide transportation, food, clothing, shelter, child care, personal and family counseling, substance abuse treatment, or other services that youth may need to succeed in school and in work-based settings. Coordinating with CBOs can fill gaps in the services provided by government and private agencies and can reduce the duplication of services. CBOs can also focus attention on the process of youth development in school-to-work initiatives by ensuring that developmental outcomes such as a positive sense of self, a sense of connection and commitment to others, and the ability to participate fully in family and community life, are incorporated into school-to-work strategies and goals.

Strategies for Engaging Community-Based Organizations

Challenge Assumptions. In most cases, there is no infrastructure to link the parallel systems of school-sponsored learning activities serving in-school youth and CBO-sponsored learning activities serving out-of-school youth. Therefore, CBOs, schools, businesses, and other partners must work together to forge these new partnerships. This type of change requires a new set of assumptions about what is possible and what CBOs and other partners can learn from each other. For example, CBOs have many strategies to share regarding how to engage and serve out-of-school youth. CBOs can take the initiative to address this issue, but other partners need to be willing to challenge their own assumptions and hear the lessons CBOs have to share. At the same time, CBOs can learn from the strategies that schools can share regarding school-to-work. Through collaboration, both parties can learn that formal schools can participate in the education of out-of-school students, while CBOs can likewise enrich the learning of in-school students.

Bring all Stakeholders to the Table. A thorough orientation and sufficient time for understanding what the school-to-work concept entails and the missions of all stakeholders are crucial to establishing a further basis for interaction. CBOs must be brought into the process of building the system from the

start, rather than being invited into the partnership at a later point in time when one special population needs to be served. Each partner in a school-to-work partnership must understand that the others operate in a different culture and bring a different viewpoint to the partnership. Some CBOs may already be well-acquainted with school-to-work, while others may not. Many CBOs have goals that coincide with school-to-work initiatives, and getting these organizations involved may be as simple as providing information and inviting them to participate. In other cases, involving CBOs will necessitate extended communication. This communication may happen formally, in community meetings, or informally, through personal contacts. Schools, businesses, and other partners also need to learn about the missions of the CBOs they will work with. One way to make numerous and diverse CBOs' missions understandable is to bring together CBOs as a coalition to see what they have in common, and then integrate them as a unit into school-to-work programs. Another way of bringing together what make seem like disparate groups is to rally around a specific issue in a school-to-work initiative--for example, the SCANS skills--and examine how CBOs could fulfill a need or help reach a goal.

Take a Participatory Approach to Agreeing on Goals and Roles. Involvement in the school-to-work partnership should always be presented and practiced as a mutually beneficial effort. Participatory planning, which clearly states the mission of the partnership, specifies the roles of different organizations, and involves the ideas and voices of all participants, is a good way to allow partners to define their roles in a STW initiative. Because each stakeholder may view the partnership as a means to achieve his or her organization's objectives, the common goal of helping young people succeed should be agreed upon and clearly stated from the outset. After identifying which CBOs are skilled in what areas, partners should allow the CBO to choose its role and the amount of responsibility it wishes to take. After the partners have established goals and responsibilities, they should let the CBOs take the lead on completing their assigned objectives. The stakeholders must also understand that roles and levels of effort may change over time.

Build on Existing Partnerships. Many strong partnerships and programs are already in place within communities, and school-to-work systems should build on their strengths. Planning should begin with an assessment of existing programs, partnerships, and assets on which to build, rather than trying to start new organizations or entities for implementation. CBOs often face constraints in that they may be limited to serving their targeted population. It is possible to fit CBOs into the school-to-work system in such a way that they continue to serve certain population groups, build on the successful components they already possess, and still adapt their activities to school-to-work concepts.

Take Time to Build Trust. Getting CBOs involved takes time, as does building partnerships among any groups. When bringing together a number of organizations, most will have other priorities and projects on which they are already focused. While an organization may be very committed to the school-to-work concept, it will take time to integrate school-to-work into its current priorities. Time is also necessary to understand organizational differences and define the roles each partner can play. Whenever an initiative brings together such a variety of stakeholders, there is potential for conflict. Some CBOs and schools may come to the table with the perception of a history of competing for the same funds. Forming a relationship means working through and putting aside any competitive feelings. Many successful partnerships have built time into meeting schedules to discuss problems that may arise or areas for improvement. This helps to avert frustration and ensure that partnerships maintain strong, positive relationships. Realistic timelines for preparation and planning will also reduce the stress and frustration that can accompany systemic reforms such as school-to-work.

Effective Practices

The Academy of Manufacturing and Engineering Technology in Minneapolis represents a partnership between the Urban League, Employment Action Committee, North High School, the City of Minneapolis, and over 450 employers. These agencies work together to serve both in-school and out-of-school youth in a career development program. Teachers at North High School recruit students in the technology cluster to participate in summer internships, while CBOs work together to provide these in-school and out-of-school youth with workplace and career development opportunities. The Employment Action Committee serves out-of-school youth all year by assessing skills, providing work

maturity training, coordinating tours of manufacturing facilities, managing students' cases, and facilitating career exploration opportunities in preparation for summer work experiences. Meanwhile, the Urban League is working year-round to develop internship opportunities. Teachers are also directly engaged with employers, working out what needs to be changed in the school curriculum and developing appropriate curriculum for out-of-school youth.

The partnership is governed by a task force composed of the above-mentioned members, which manages its affairs and works to articulate postsecondary involvement. Minneapolis city staff help to co-manage the program, oversee fiscal matters, and chair the task force. The partnership also interacts with the Youth Network, a small group of CBOs, in order to increase communication and collaborate in the recruiting and referral of youth. The program is financed by matching funds and resources from the local community development agency, the Department of Labor, and the private sector.

The program grew out of the Minneapolis School-to-Work Consortium. The Urban League and North High School had already formed a relationship, and the City of Minneapolis has a strong alternative high school system. The manufacturing industry was particularly willing to participate in the partnership because of the labor shortage they were experiencing. Prior to this collaboration, parallel systems had existed for in-school youth, out-of-school youth, and those"in-between" youth who were in danger of falling through the cracks. Developing a cohesive partnership has helped to reduce costs so that, for example, one lab can be purchased to serve all groups. The partnership fills an important niche in the larger vision of the Minneapolis School-to-Career Transition Consortium by enriching the learning experience and fulfilling the needs of college-bound, non-college-bound, and out-of-school youth alike.

The Diploma Plus Program provides school-to-work opportunities for out-of-school and at-risk youth in several Massachusetts communities, including Boston, Brockton, and Springfield. The program combines elements of GED programs, alternative education, adult education, and school-to-work to provide an opportunity for students to earn regular high school diplomas. Students earn diplomas based on proof of competency, not "time-in-seat." They spend their first year working on foundation skills, career planning, and personal development through the use of applied learning techniques. The next year is spent in internships, senior seminars, and postsecondary courses. Postsecondary involvement, work-based learning, and the close attention of the teacher/advisor are essential components to ensuring the success of students.

Some Diploma Plus programs are working with local high schools to incorporate public school teachers into their programs. They also try to secure matching funds from different levels of government and collaborate with schools to incorporate their already existing business contacts into the high-schools' school-to-work programs. Each Diploma Plus program has a paid staff person who coordinates school-to-career activities. Some Diploma Plus programs have become part of the Alternative Education Alliances in their communities. These alliances interact with schools and businesses to build broader-based partnerships. The Corporation for Business, Work and Learning (CBWL), the developer of Diploma Plus, makes sure that each program is tailored to meet the local conditions. CBWL acts a conduit for school/CBO collaboration, offering mini-grants and providing technical assistance to individual programs.

Effective Practices

Diploma Plus Program, University High School: Lewis Gitelman, 178 Tremont Street, Boston, MA 02111. (617) 357-6000. http://www.boston.abcd.org/youthnet.

Minneapolis Employment and Training Program: Ken Dahl, Room 310 1/2, City Hall 350, South 5th Street, Minneapolis, MN 55415-1388. (612) 673-2622. http://www.mpls.k12.mn.us/. jwilkosz@mpls.k12.mn.us.

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Organizations

American Youth Policy Forum is a nonprofit professional development program targeted toward federal policy aides in the U.S. Congress and executive branch. The Forum has recently identified successful youth-serving programs across the country, including CBO-sponsored programs as well as formal education programs. In addition, the Forum features comprehensive youth development programs in the field trips and policy reports that it sponsors. 1001 Connecticut Avenue Northwest, Suite 719, Washington, DC 20036. (202) 775-9731. aypf@aypf.org.

Asset-Based Community Development Institute (ABCD) develops tools and resources for building community, creates community-building networks, and trains community leaders on effective methods for developing coalitions. ABCD has developed technical workbooks for mapping local assets and capacities which may be particularly useful for involving CBOs in school-to-work. Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Northwestern University, 2040 Sheridan Road, Evanston, IL 60201-4100. (847) 491-3518. http://www.nwu.edu/IPR/abcd.html. earlee@nwu.edu.

Center for Youth Development and Policy Research (CYD) at the Academy for Educational Development focuses on the definition and promotion of national and community-based strategies and standards for positive youth development. Through research and recommendations, CYD aims to persuade policy makers, practitioners, and the public to support the development of competent, committed, and assured youth. 1875 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20009. (202) 884-8000. http://www.aed.org. cyd@aed.org.

Corporation for Business, Work and Learning (CBWL) has helped develop programs that involve CBOs in school-to-work programs including Communities and Schools for Career Success and Diploma Plus. CBWL awards mini-grants and provides technical assistance to partnerships of schools, businesses, and community-based organizations. Schrafft Center, 529 Main Street, Suite 110, Boston, MA 02129. (617) 727-8158. http://www.cbwl.com. ccabral@bssc.org.

Corporation for National and Community Service is a federal agency whose mission is to engage Americans of all ages and backgrounds in community-based service that addresses the nation's education, public safety, human, and environmental needs. The Corporation administers AmeriCorps, the National Senior Service Corps, and Learn and Serve America. 1201 New York Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20015 (202) 606-5000 http://www.cns.gov jtoscano@cns.gov.

National Association of Partners in Education (NAPE) is a national membership organization dedicated to providing leadership in the formation of effective educational partnerships between a school or school district and one or more community organizations and businesses. NAPE provides leadership to educators, citizens, businesses, and other community organizations to help to create understanding and build trust among these partners. 209 Madison Street, Suite 401, Alexandria, VA 22314. (703) 836-4880. http://www.napehq.org. napehq@napehq.org.

National Association of Service and Conservation Corps (NASCC) is a membership organization for 120 state and youth corps programs around the country. NASCC serves as an advocate, central reference point, and source of assistance for the growing number of state and local youth corps. Corps programs engage young people, generally 16 to 25 years old, in paid, productive, full-time work which benefits both the youth and their communities. Corps members devote part of each week to improving their basic education skills and preparing for future employment. 666 Eleventh Street, NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20001. (202) 737-6272. http://www.nascc.org. grteam@nascc.org.

National Center for Workforce Preparation is a division of National 4-H Council. The Center has designed a model called "Preparing Youth for Employable Futures" to help create workforce preparation programs. The organization produces a variety of practical tools for implementing school-to-work initiatives community-wide. 7100 Connecticut Avenue, Chevy Chase, MD 20815. (301) 961-2908. http://www.fourhcouncil.edu/wfctrtop.htm. parent@fourhcouncil.edu.

National Community Education Association (NCEA) is a non-profit organization that provides training, information, leadership and networking opportunities, and advocacy for its members, state and local affiliates, community education professionals, and local volunteers. NCEA emphasizes the importance of family and community involvement. 3929 Old Lee Highway, Suite 91-A, Fairfax, VA 22030-2401. (703) 359-8973. http://www.idsonline.com/ncea/. ncea@ncea.com.

National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC) is a network of over 80 youth employment/development organizations dedicated to promoting policies and programs which help youth succeed in becoming lifelong learners, productive workers, and self-sufficient citizens. NYEC has launched PEPNet, an effective practices network which shares information about youth policies and programs among practitioners, policy makers, researchers, and advocates. 1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 728, Washington , DC 20036. (202) 659-1064. http://www.ttrc.doleta.gov/pepnet. employouth@aol.com.

New Ways to Work is a non-profit organization dedicated to identifying innovative workplace practices, such as the integration of school-based and work-based learning. Its New Ways Workers program collaborates with schools and community-based organizations to ensure that the needs of both in-school and out-of-school youth are met. It also incorporates businesses into the development process in order to identify employer demands more effectively and foster more receptive workplace environments. 785 Market Street, Suite 950, San Francisco, CA 94103. (415) 995-9860. http://www.nww.org/. info@nww.org.

RPP International, Inc., works to bridge the gap between educational research, policy, and practice. RPP provides technical assistance to schools, community and government agencies, and private industries to enable them to implement effective system change practices, based in research and grounded in standards. RPP's work is based on a framework for viewing K-12, community colleges, postsecondary institutions, and job training programs as part of a single system closely linked to employment. 2200 Powell Street, Suite 250, Emeryville, CA 94608. (510) 450-2550. http://www.rppintl.com. stephanie@rppintl.com.

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